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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess changes in parental skills and attitudes and to examine children's self-concept and behavior following parents' participation in one of two skills training programs. Pretest and posttest measures were administered to 15 working-class parents participating in a communication skills program, to 7 parents participating in a behavioral skills program, and to 12 parents assigned to a nonequivalent control group. It was expected that a 3-month follow-up with selected measures would reveal a changed attitude toward childrearing in parents participating in either skills training program. It was also expected that the children of parents who participated in either training group would show positive changes in self-concept. Results indicated that both skills training models were effective in developing their respective skills, in influencing parental attitudes, and in increasing the self-esteem of participants' children. However, evidence for children's behavioral change and perceptions of parental skill attainment remained inconclusive. (Author/MP)

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The Differential Effectiveness of Two Models of Skills Training for Working Class Parents

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess changes in parental skills and attitudes, and children's self-concept and behavior following parents' participation in one of two skills training programs. Pretest and posttest measures were administered to working-class parents participating in a communication skills program or a behavioral skills program, and to parents assigned to a non-equivalent control group. A three month follow-up was conducted with selected measures.

It was expected that parents would change their child rearing attitudes in a positive direction following their participation in either skills training program. This expectation was met to some extent, as parents perceived themselves as playing more of a role in the causation of their children's behavior and perceived a greater mutual understanding in the area of parent-child communication. These results were maintained at a three month follow-up. It was also expected that the children of parents who participated in either training group would show positive changes in self-concept. This hypothesis was supported at posttest and at follow-up.

The research finds indicated that parents who completed communication skills training demonstrated better communication skills than untrained parents. Their children, however, did not perceive increased skills. There were no perceived behavioral

changes in the children at posttest, but at the three month follow-up communication skills parents perceived their children as less withdrawn and/or hostile.

It was expected that parents who completed behavioral skills training would demonstrate greater knowledge of behavioral principles and that they would perceive behavioral changes in their children. The first hypothesis was borne out while the second one was not. Children of behavioral skills parents did perceive their parents as being more congruent.

It was concluded that both skills training models were effective in developing their respective skills, influencing parental attitudes, and increasing the self-esteem of the participant's children. The evidence for children's behavioral change and perceptions of parental skill attainment is still inconclusive.

The Differential Effectiveness of Two Models of Skills Training for Working Class Parents

Parent education groups have been conducted in the United States since at least 1815. Early parent education groups were relatively unstructured discussion groups, with leaders facilitating group discussion, providing support, and giving advice based on the needs and questions of the participants (Auerback, 1968; Brim, 1965). Later groups were more structured with group leaders providing more didactic instruction based on various theoretical materials (Ginott, 1957; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). The most recent development in parent education has been the skills training model, wherein parents are taught specific parenting skills in a structured manner.

Skills training groups differ from discussion groups and didactic/discussion groups in that the focus is on teaching the skills needed to implement the principles and techniques rather than imparting knowledge or facilitating group process. Specific parenting skills are taught in an organized manner, progressing from simpler to more complex skills. Aspects of skills training include: (1) Identification of explicit behavioral objectives; (2) practice of specific skills; (3) group discussion; (4) understanding the rationale for the use of specific skills; (5) sequential presentation of skills; (6) active trainee participation; (7) use of modeling techniques, and (8) use of immediate feedback (Danish & Hauer, 1973). Skills training has been utilized with two different approaches to parent education: behavioral and communicational.

Behavioral skills training is based on behavioral principles of child management. The goals of most behavior skills training groups are to : (1) train parents to focus on observable and measurable behavior; (2) teach parents learning theory concepts, i.e., reinforcement and punishment; and (3) help parents apply these concepts to their behavior with their children (Gordon & Davidson, 1981). Communication skills training groups are based on Carl Rogers' (1957) necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic growth: empathy, congruence or genuiness, and unconditional positive regard. Reflection and expression of feelings are emphasized as parents are systematically taught to recognize and respond to their children's feelings, and to be aware of and express their own feelings (Levant,1978).

The evaluative research has provided moderate support for the efficacy of both skills training models. Behavioral skills group training has been found to be an effective and cost-efficient method for helping parents modify their children's behavior, especially for discrete, well-defined behavior problems (Cone & Sloop, 1971; Gordon & Davidson, 1981). Communication skills group training has been shown to be effective in terms of parental attitudinal change and skill attainment, and children's self-esteem and behavior (Levant, 1978; Gordon, 1980).

Research has recently focused on the differential effectivenss of the two training models, but with inclusive results. Several

studies have failed to differentiate skills training from discussion group approaches, comparing a skills training program from one theoretical orientation with a discussion group from another (Alexander & Parsons, 1973; Parsons & Alexander, 1973; Tavormina, 1975). These studies confounded theoretical orientation with pedagogical method, and used as an alternative treatment an approach (discussion group) which might be best considered a placebo control. Others have used standardized programs (i.e. Parent Effectiveness Training) in non-standard or abbreviated formats (Anchor & Thomas, 1977; Schultz, Nystul & Law, 1980; Schultz & Nystul, 1981), or have not equated the two skills training programs for contact time (Pinsker & Geoffroy, 1981;Schofield, 1976).

It is the purpose of this study to examine the differential effectiveness of communicational and behavioral skills training programs with a working class, clinic population of parents. Comparable training methods were utilized and standardized measures which reflected the goals of each program were employed.

Method

Procedure

The study was conducted at two mental health clinics serving an ethnically diverse, working class population in the greater Boston area. A communication skills group and a behavioral skills group (with random treatment assignment) were conducted

and comparison groups were formed at each site. Participation in the groups was voluntary. Because of their comparability on demographic and dependent variables at pretest, the data from the two sites were pooled.

The research design consisted of a pretest-posttest model with two treatment groups and a no-treatment non-equivalent comparison group (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The parents and one of their children were pre and posttested on the dependent measures before and after the skills training. Selected measures were administered at a three month follow-up.

Subjects

Fifteen parents constituted the behavioral skills group, and seven parents constituted the communication skills group. The comparison group was composed of twelve parents, six of whom were referred to the parents groups and were unable to attend, and six who were randomly selected from the clinic population.

The demographic data for each group, as it appears in Table 1, includes information on the parents and the child who was seen as the "problem", and with whom parents applied their skills. Across the three groups, referrals were comparable in terms of referral source, religion, marital status, child's school, sex and age of parent, sex and age of child, socioeconomic status, and ethnic background.

Interventions

Two systematic skills training parent education programs

were conducted: behavioral and communicational. Both groups had two hour meetings held in the evening once a week for eight weeks, and were led by the same team, consisting of two advanced doctoral candidates, one female and one male. One group leader had experience and training in the behavioral skills approach, while the other had training and experience in the communication skills approach.

Training for each group consisted of a sequential presentation of the respective skills, active parent participation through discussion and role play, leader modeling of desired skills, homework projects, and feedback to the parents on their use of the skills. The communication skills group focused on the skills of empathy and genuiness, and their application in problem-solving situations. Homework exercises were assigned from a Parents' Workbook (Levant & Haffey, 1981). The behavioral skills group focused on the skills of behavioral management--observing and recording behavior, and changing behavior through positive social reinforcement and effective punishment. Homework exercises were also assigned from a workbook (Kanigsberg, 1982).

Dependent Variables and Measures

The effectiveness of the two skills training models was assessed by six instruments. The Helpee Stimulus Expression Instrument was used to assess parents' ability to discriminate and communicate the skills of empathy and genuiness. The

Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory was to measure children's perceptions of parents' communication skills. The Knowledge of Behavioral Principles as Applied to Children was used to assess parents' knowledge of behavioral principles of child management. The Becker Bi-Polar Adjective Checklist was employed to assess parental preceptions of changes in children's behavior. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was utilized to measure children's self-concept. Finally, the Hereford Parent Attitude Survey was used to measure parental attitudes toward childrearing.

Helpee Stimulus Expression Instrument (HSEI)

This instrument, developed by Carkhuff and associates (Kratochovil, Carkhuff, & Berenson, 1969), presents parents with child statements which reflect common problem areas at home. To assess ability to discriminate good vs. poor parental responses, parents were presented with five child statements and asked to select the most helpful response to each from among four pre-rated alternatives. To assess the communication skills of empathy and genuiness, parents were presented with five additional child statements and instructed to respond in their most helpful manner.

Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (BLRI)

This instrument measures four aspects of any two-person re-

lationship: empathic understanding, level of regard, unconditionality of regard, and congruence or genuiness. Although the inventory was originally designed for use in a client-therapist relationship, Barrett-Lennard (1962) has indicated the measure was applicable to any close relationship. The present study used a modification of the Teacher Pupil Relationship Inventory form, substituting the words "mother" or "father" for "teacher", and "child" for "pupil".

Knowledge of Behavior Principles as Applied to Children

This instrument provides a general measure of knowledge of behavioral principles and their practical application to children and childrearing. It consists of 50 multiple choice items, and is scored according to protocol to yield a single summary score (O'Dell, Benlolo, & Flynn, 1979).

Becker Bi-Polar Adjective Checklist

This instrument was originated by Becker (1960) and refined by Patterson and Fagot (1967). Parents are presented with a list of 47 bi-polar adjective pairs (e.g., adventurous vs. timid, happy vs. depressed) and are asked to place their child along a seven-point continuum. The instrument yields five factor scores: Relaxed Disposition, Withdrawn/Hostile, Aggressiveness, Intelligence/Efficient, and Conduct Problem.

Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept scale (Piers & Harris, 1969) is a quickly completed (15-20 minutes) self-report instrument designed for children in grades three through twelve (ages 8-18). The 80 item questionnaire is in the format of "yes" or "no" response alternatives.

Hereford Parent Attitude Survey

The Hereford Parent Attitude Survey (Hereford, 1963) consists of 77 forced choice items designed to measure parental attitudes in five areas: (1) confidence in the parental role, particularly in the uncertainty of handling problems brought about by their children; (2) causation, natural or inherent, of the child's behavior; (3) acceptance of the child's feelings, behavior, and normal developmental changes; (4) mutual understanding in the area of communication between parents and children; and (5) mutual trust in the child's individuality as opposed to his being merely an extension of the parents.

Results

The data was analyzed using analysis of covariance, with the pretest scores as the covariates. Post hoc comparisons were made using the .05 level of significance. The results are presented in Table 2.

The results indicated that parents in both treatment groups perceived themselves as playing more of a role in the causation of their children's behavior. These results were maintained at a three month follow-up. Children of parents who participated in either training group demonstrated positive changes in self-concept, both at posttest and at follow-up.

The research findings indicated that parents who completed communication skills training demonstrated better communication skills than untrained parents. Their children, however, did not perceive increased skills. There were no perceived behavioral changes in the children at posttest, but at the three month follow-up communication skills parents perceived their children as less withdrawn and/or hostile. Communication skills parents also perceived a greater mutual understanding in the area of parent child communication.

Parents who completed behavioral skills training demonstrated greater knowledge of behavioral principles than untrained parents. There were no perceived changes in their children's behavior, however. Children of behavioral skills parents did perceive their parents as being more congruent.

Discussion

The data indicate that both parent training groups were effective in terms of influencing parental attitudes and children's

self-concept, but not children's behavior. The improvement in children's self-concept is an important finding since there are few studies where significant differences are found in such a short period of time. The durability of the changes suggests that the effects may be long term. The fact that parents felt more in control of their children's behavior and perceived greater mutual understanding between themselves and their children may well be related to the children's improved self-concept.

The results indicate that parents learned the skills they were taught when paper and pencil tests were used to measure skill attainment. Parents who completed communication skills training were able to demonstrate significantly greater communication skills on a written instrument, and parents who completed behavioral skills training were able to demonstrate significantly greater knowledge of behavioral principles on a written test. This replicates the findings of a similar comparative study (Pinsker & Geoffroy, 1981) while equating the groups for contact time, controlling for the leader variable and utilizing a working class population.

While there is evidence of skill attainment, the data yields little evidence of skill application, at least with regard to communication skills. Not only must parents learn communication skills but the children must also perceive their parents as communicating differently. Children of communication skills part-

icipants did not perceive an increase in communication skills as was expected. While perhaps the difficulties associated with assessing such perceptual changes in children have masked real changes in perception, it is more likely that additional time is needed before children would perceive changes in parental communication.

An unexpected finding was that behavioral skills participants were perceived by their children as being more congruent at the end of training. Behavioral training emphasized following through with consequences, both positive and negative, and may have resulted in more congruent behavior ("I mean what I say"), though not necessarily more congruent communication ("I say what I feel"). While the instrument was designed to measure congruent communication, the children may have been responding to increased congruent behavior, indicating that parents were utilizing behavioral principles with their children.

Neither behavioral nor communication skills parents perceived changes in their children's behavior. It is possible that children's behavior changed, but was not picked up by the Becker instrument (which focuses on traits and general behaviors rather than specific behavior). It is also possible that a change in perceived behavior would be more apparent after a longer follow-up period, or it may be that more extensive parent training is needed to have a direct effect on child behavior.

It was concluded that both skills training models were effective in developing their respective skills, influencing

parental attitudes, and improving the self-concept of the participants' children. The evidence for children's behavioral change and perceptions of parental skill attainment is still inconclusive.

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Table 1

Demographic Data for Treatment and Comparison Group Participants

Variable	BS (N=15)	CS (N=7)	C (N=12)	Test of Significance
Referral Source				
Intake worker	9 (82%)	2 (18%)	0	$x^2 = 11.75$
Therapist	6 (27%)	5 (23%)	11 (50%)	($p > .19$)
Outside agency	0	0	1 (100%)	
Religion				
Catholic	11 (44%)	6 (24%)	8 (32%)	$x^2 = .86$
Protestant	4 (44%)	1 (12%)	4 (44%)	($p > .50$)
Marital Status				
Single	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	$x^2 = 5.25$
Married with spouse attending group	9 (60%)	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	($p > .50$)
Married without spouse attending group	5 (42%)	2 (16%)	5 (42%)	
Child's School				
Public	8 (44%)	4 (22%)	6 (34%)	$x^2 = .11$
Parocial	7 (44%)	3 (19%)	6 (37%)	($p > .50$)
Sex of child				
Male	5 (28%)	7 (39%)	6 (33%)	$x^2 = 8.54$
Female	10 (62.5%	0	6 (37.5%)	($p > .15$)
Sex of parent				
Male	4 (44%)	1 (12%)	4 (44%)	$x^2 = .86$
Female	11 (44%)	6 (24%)	8 (32%)	($p > .50$)
Ethnic background				
Anglo Saxon	9 (45%)	4 (20%)	7 (35%)	$x^2 = 9.55$
French Canadian	0	1 (100%)	0	($p > .50$)
Italian	2 (100%)	0	0	
Irish	4 (44%)	2 (23%)	3 (33%)	
Black	0	0	1 (100%)	
Polish	0	0	1 (100%)	

Table 1 (cont.)

Variable	BS	CS	C	Test of Significance
Age of Parent				
Mean	38.3	39.4	38.2	F = .116 (a)
SD	1.5	2.1	5.1	(p > .50)
Age of Child				
Mean	10.5	10.7	12.0	F = .760 (a)
SD	1.0	1.0	2.2	(p > .45)
Socioeconomic Status (b)				
Mean	3.6	3.6	3.3	F = .203 (a)
SD	.2	.3	1.2	(p > .50)

(a) df = 2, 31, unadjusted one way analysis of variance

(b) Socioeconomic status based on Hamburger's (1957) revision of the Warner, Meckev, Eells Occupational Classification System (1949). This system was chosen because of its wider range of socioeconomic class specification and its lessened degree of sexual bias.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Pre-test, Post-test and Follow-up Measures

	Behavioral Skills		Communication Skills		Comparison		
Measure	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F
Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale							
Pre-test	53.00	10.80	58.71	6.76	46.60	11.58	2.627 a
Post-test	57.42	8.36	62.14	4.41	46.50	10.95	4.272 b *
Follow-up	61.46	6.33	61.43	5.65	49.50	10.18	4.524 c *
Becker: less relaxed d							
Pre-test	3.73	6.41	4.29	4.20	2.18	3.66	0.394 a
Post-test	4.13	5.44	4.43	2.51	5.73	5.10	0.957 b
Follow-up	2.67	3.68	3.71	3.04	2.64	5.03	0.134 c
Becker: less withdrawn/hostile							
Pre-test	-0.80	6.85	4.57	4.00	-0.73	4.77	2.213 a
Post-test	-0.13	5.96	6.43	4.28	-0.09	6.09	1.442 b
Follow-up	-1.08	4.42	6.29	6.73	-2.36	5.37	3.752 c *
Becker: more aggressive							
Pre-test	6.20	5.68	9.57	1.92	4.18	3.81	2.784 a
Post-test	5.80	4.57	9.43	2.51	5.82	4.88	0.617 b
Follow-up	4.58	4.01	7.71	2.98	5.55	5.13	0.787 c
Becker: intelligent/efficient							
Pre-test	0.80	6.64	1.71	2.31	5.46	3.37	2.619 a
Post-test	2.73	3.52	0.57	3.69	4.00	4.54	1.429 b
Follow-up	0.58	3.73	4.57	2.99	3.55	5.52	1.916 c
Becker: conduct problems							
Pre-test	0.80	3.79	-1.43	2.87	-0.46	5.40	0.295 a
Post-test	0.80	5.94	-1.86	3.24	0.82	4.09	0.705 b
Follow-up	1.25	4.18	-2.29	4.07	0.00	5.23	1.124 c
Hereford: confidence							
Pre-test	1.60	6.13	3.43	5.26	3.18	4.26	0.365 a
Post-test	4.87	6.55	5.29	6.85	3.36	6.77	0.658 b
Follow-up	4.33	5.99	8.43	12.93	1.36	7.81	2.260 c
Hereford: causation							
Pre-test	12.67	7.02	13.00	3.93	12.36	5.01	0.023 a
Post-test	14.07	6.55	17.00	5.13	12.00	7.09	3.449 b *
Follow-up	15.58	5.09	17.71	8.04	12.27	6.12	3.959 c *

Table 2 Continued

	Behavioral Skills		Communication Skills		Comparison		
Measure	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F
Hereford: acceptance							
Pre-test	13.13	7.13	14.47	7.58	9.36	7.62	1.173a
Post-test	10.87	7.82	13.43	12.27	8.64	5.64	0.236b
Follow-up	12.75	7.68	14.71	10.98	8.36	6.59	0.324c
Hereford: understanding							
Pre-test	14.00	8.25	16.71	7.38	13.18	5.64	0.479a
Post-test	13.27	8.36	19.43	8.30	11.36	7.15	4.533b*
Follow-up	15.08	6.57	18.86	8.15	10.91	7.00	4.434c*
Hereford: trust							
Pre-test	10.73	8.09	14.00	6.05	11.18	6.83	0.458a
Post-test	10.07	8.34	15.00	7.07	12.64	6.59	0.992b
Follow-up	11.83	8.10	16.29	7.69	10.82	5.83	1.285c
Helpee Stimulus Expression Instrument (HSEI): Discrimination							
Pre-test	2.9	.4	2.8	.6	2.6	.5	1.505a
Post-test	2.8	.4	3.1	.2	2.7	.5	3.640b*
HSEI: Empathy							
Pre-test	1.4	.4	1.4	.3	1.2	.4	.847a
Post-test	1.4	.5	2.7	.9	1.5	.5	30.754b***
HSEI: Genuineness							
Pre-test	2.6	.6	2.4	.4	2.0	.3	4.936a*
Post-test	2.2	.4	3.0	.5	2.3	.3	10.047b***
BLRI: Level of Regard							
Pre-test	21.4	17.0	22.3	3.8	8.4	20.2	2.239a
Post-test	23.0	12.0	21.7	6.7	22.7	19.7	.042b
BLRI: Empathy							
Pre-test	1.8	10.9	11.3	8.4	-3.4	16.2	2.700a
Post-test	6.6	11.6	9.6	6.5	3.2	17.8	1.018b
BLRI: Unconditionality							
Pre-test	8.5	8.1	1.0	16.2	-3.3	12.8	2.949a
Post-test	2.0	10.1	5.6	10.6	4.7	14.6	.332b
BLRI: Congruence							
Pre-test	1.3	15.7	11.1	10.4	3.7	15.0	.994a
Post-test	18.1	11.9	16.1	9.0	5.6	15.6	4.134b*
O'Dell							
Pre-test	19.9	8.2	24.0	12.8	14.0	7.5	2.697a
Post-test	33.4	7.1	22.8	2.1	21.6	7.2	26.408b***

Table 2 Continued

a df=2,30 unadjusted one-way analysis of variance

b df=2,29 adjusted for covariance

c df=2,26 adjusted for covariance

d On each Becker subscale, a high score reflects more of the trait listed, i.e., a high score on the first subscale indicates that parents perceive their child as less relaxed.

*= $p < .05$

**= $p < .01$

***= $p < .001$